



A Homeowner's Guide to Managing Leaves

Let Them Fall

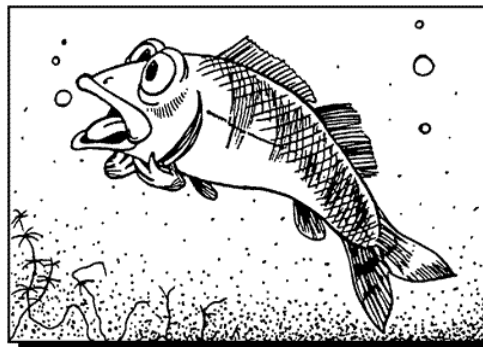
As summer comes to a close and autumn hints of red and yellow begin to fill the forests, the inevitable falling of leaves is soon to come. Out come the rakes, mowing mulchers, and tillers to reuse this natural supply of nutrients. Similarly, out come the giant brown bags and leaf vacuums for those who do not wish to reuse their leaves. Whatever your inclination, there are a few important things to remember concerning leaves and the environment.



Keep Them Clear

Clogged storm water drains present several environmental and human health concerns. When storm water runoff is unable to flow down the storm drain, streets are susceptible to flooding. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, standing water due to flooding is a breeding ground for mosquitoes and waterborne illnesses.

When an abundance of leaves enters the storm water system, they are stored in basins before being flushed into surface waters. When stored, the leaves decompose and deplete dissolved oxygen in the water. This loss of dissolved oxygen adversely affects the aquatic life in those surface waters. By preventing excess leaves from entering storm drains, you are helping to maintain the health of our surface waters.





Reuse Them

Reusing your leaves is a cost efficient and environmentally friendly way to maintain the health of your lawn. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, 24% of each landfill is taken up by yard waste. *Composting* is one way to reuse your leaves by reintroducing them as mulch or viable topsoil for flower and vegetable beds.

Mulching your leaves with an ordinary mower is another cost efficient option. It is best to mow over your lawn twice to assure your leaves are mulched small enough to avoid thatch. Thatch occurs when a layer of leaves or grass clippings forms on top of a lawn. Thatch inhibits sunlight and rain from entering the lawn, thereby causing brown spots where the lawn has died. This is easily avoided by going over your lawn twice, in a crisscross pattern with your mower.



Take Them Away

Depending on the county in which you reside, you may gather your leaves to be vacuumed, or bag them to be removed. According to the Prince George's County Department of Public Works, leaf vacuuming is available twice a year and leaf bag pick up is available weekly. To find out if your county offers leaf vacuuming or curbside leaf bag pickup, please contact your local public works department.

For more information please visit the following sites:

www.epa.compost

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/

www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming/where.htm

<http://www.howardcountymd.gov/DPW/autumn.htm>

[http://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/Government/AgencyIndex/DER/waste.asp?nivel=foldmenu\(8\)](http://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/Government/AgencyIndex/DER/waste.asp?nivel=foldmenu(8))